

LETTERS

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TO

THE AUTHOR

OF

*Remarks on several late Publications
relative to the Dissenters,*

In a LETTER to Dr. PRIESTLEY.

BY JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, LL. D. F. R. S.

———*Fratrum quoque gratia rara est.* OVID.

L O N D O N :

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LETTERS

THE AUTHOR



Letters to the Author of *Remarks on
several late Publications relative to the
Dissenters.*

LETTER I.

S I R,

I THINK myself obliged to you
for your very civil and respectful
address, and sincerely wish it were
in my power to make you such a
Reply, as you probably expect from
me. I am, indeed, sorry to find myself under a
necessity of giving pain to a person of your taste,
and seemingly nice feelings; but it is now too
late for me to give much attention to those *polite
accomplishments*, which you so strongly recom-
mend. Instead of flattery, therefore, expect no-
thing but frankness and sincerity, both in answer
to your remarks on my publications, and in those
which, in return, I shall take the liberty to make
upon yours.

You cannot observe, you say, p. 5, *without
concern*

concern, that several things in my late publications seem to discover a degree of precipitation, inattention to real life, and vehemence of temper, which, you are afraid, will be of little advantage to the cause I mean to serve. That I am fallible I need not say; for that is the portion of humanity. I may, therefore, have the very failings you here ascribe to me: and if, after as fair an examination as I am capable of, I be convinced that your accusation is true, I shall be ready, if I know myself, to acknowledge my offence in the fullest manner. But with respect to those passages in my writings, which have drawn this censure upon me, it is possible that all the guilt I have to plead is, that of speaking out *certain truths* too bluntly, and condemning those who would trim, and accommodate them to the fashion and manners of the age. Let my defence be heard, and let our readers judge between us.

There may be some who will think me too precipitate in this answer to your letter; and some may blame me for answering it at all; but I chuse to do it, because it will give me an opportunity of being a little more explicit on some of the subjects on which you have descanted. If I were to add another reason, it would be that I was willing to take the first opportunity of noting a new species of Dissenters, that I was sensible, had been some time springing up among

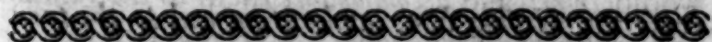
mong us, consisting chiefly of young gentlemen and fine ladies; who have as little of the *spirit*, as they have of the *external appearance* of the old Puritans; but whose principles were never exhibited to the public before. In your performance the world has the first opportunity of examining the depth of them, and I had an inclination to report to the public what that depth really is.

Not to fatigue your attention too much at a time, I shall for the present conclude with assuring you, that I am,

SIR, Your very humble Servant,

JOSEPH PRIESTLEY.

Leeds, 2d July 1770.



L E T T E R I I.

S I R, •

I F I at all understand the nature of your principal charge against me, it is, that through a *vehemence of temper*, and *ignorance of real life*, producing too great a degree of *precipitation*, I have *unseasonably revived the attention of Dissenters to the principles of their dissent*, p. 14, that I have *not submitted my zeal to the guidance*

of prudence and discretion, p. 72, and that I have advanced several things, that will be of little advantage to the cause I mean to serve, p. 5.

Admitting that the dissenting interest is the cause of religion, liberty, and truth (which you deny) There seems, you say, p. 14, to be no particular propriety in reminding us of this at the present time; and, with an air of triumph, you add, p. 15, While we are permitted to worship our maker in whatever manner we judge most proper, and publicly to declare, and support our religious opinions, both from the pulpit and the press, without fear of molestation; what propriety can there be in endeavouring to recall our attention to the subject of religious liberty, and guard us against submitting to the yoke of ecclesiastical tyranny? You seem, moreover to fear, p. 15, lest such ill timed zeal should rouse the sleeping lion, and put an end to the tranquility which we at present enjoy, and which, you say, we cannot value at too high a rate.

Now really, Sir, I cannot help expressing my surprise, that a person of your attention to *real life* should talk in this manner. I should, indeed, have wondered at it in any man who had read no more than the common news-papers, and those pamphlets that pass thro' every body's hands. It is certainly a time to defend, when we are attacked. You yourself say, p. 14, that
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if we were threatened with severe treatment on account of our dissent, it would be a proper season to awaken the zeal of Dissenters, in defence of their common rights. You also say, p. 60, that the manner in which Dr. Blackstone had represented the Dissenters was, to say the least, injudicious; and he could never expect that severe censures cast upon so respectable a body, by a person whose opinions are generally received with deference, would pass without notice. By saying that Dr. Blackstone's attack upon the Dissenters was, to say the least, injudicious, I presume you will acknowledge, that it might have been considered in a worse light, and, as it actually was considered by many, viz. an unprovoked threatening of the Dissenters, coming from considerable authority. You admit, however, that there was a fair call for some person to stand forth in their vindication. You also allow me, p. 1, to be an able defender of the dissenting interest. Then pray, Sir, putting things properly together, where was the unseasonableness of my *Remarks on Dr. Blackstone*, or the *View of the principles of the Dissenters*, which I meant as a sequel, or continuation of them; containing a fuller vindication of the principles of the Dissenters, than I thought proper to enter into in the way of controversy. Will not Dr. Balguy's *Sermon on Church Authority* be an apology for my *Considerations* on the same subject; and these contain all the pieces that bear my name, on which you animadvert. As

As to the *Address to Protestant Dissenters*, as such, you have no right to call it even *my adopted child*, p. 7. unless I had declared my approbation of the whole of it. I think, however, with the author of that performance, that the more valuable part of the dissenting interest is at present upon the decline; and I am clearly of opinion, that there was the greatest propriety in his address to them on that subject. It appears to me to be well calculated to revive the attention of Dissenters to the true principles of their dissent. Those principles are so little understood, or thought of at present, that such an attempt was highly seasonable; and many persons think that the author of it, whoever he be, deserves the thanks of all serious, rational, and steady Dissenters.

You own, p. 15. that *it is sometimes highly expedient to remind Dissenters of their principles, and the grounds of their separation, and to endeavour to awaken in them a spirit of inquiry with regard to those subjects*; and I think it is generally supposed to be a proper time to remind persons of any thing, when they seem to have forgotten it. As to the interests of *practical religion*, which you do well to be concerned about, p. 16. I think that they are in less danger of suffering from this controversy, than from a total inattention to the subject.

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On more accounts than one, the present time seems to be peculiarly seasonable for the discussion of every thing relating to civil and religious liberty; especially as the attention of this nation is, in some measure, awake to it, and their minds are prepared for it. A wise man, therefore, will be glad to lay hold on so fair an opportunity of endeavouring to make the true principles of civil and religious liberty more generally understood and valued.

Tamely to acquiesce in the unjust claims of others, is to submit to absolute servitude. The mind that can do it is already enslaved; and a remonstrance, asserting our natural and civil rights, in order to be well timed, should be as early as possible. It should closely follow the first invasion of them. As to the *tranquility which we enjoy at present* (in which we are visibly tending to absolute indifference, with respect to all the distinctions of religion, and to religion itself) I differ from you greatly in thinking it to be such as *cannot be valued at too high a rate*. I almost think that what you call the *rousing of the sleeping lion*, would be the less evil of the two.

But pray, Sir, how is your dread of rousing this same *sleeping lion* consistent with your assertion, that *we are permitted publickly to declare,*
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and support our religious opinions, both from the pulpit and the press, without fear of molestation. What have I done more than you say I am permitted to do, without fear of molestation? For my part, I would hardly thank any man for a power of doing less. Besides how can we feel, and enjoy the benefit of any right, or even be sure that we are possessed of it, if we never exercise it.

As you speak in such very high terms of the *tranquillity the Dissenters enjoy at present*, and expressly say, *that it cannot be valued at too high a rate*, I own I was exceedingly desirous to find some more particular representation of the great privileges of the Dissenters, than is contained in that page; that I might have a better idea what it is you are so very thankful for; but perusing page 60. I was surprized to find you observe, *That they enjoy some of their most important liberties only by connivance, and through the moderation and good sense of their governors; and not under the protection of the law; that the condition of their being admitted into posts of honour and profit in the civil state is such, as, with regard to many among them, amounts to an actual exclusion; and that they are obliged to contribute their full share towards the support of a body of men, from whose labours they reap no advantage, are hardships of which it is impossible they should be insensible, and*
from

from which they must certainly wish to be delivered. This indeed may, as you say, be consistent with a just sense of the advantages they enjoy, for that it would be, if they were barely suffered to live; but how such a situation, tho' a tranquil one, yet abounding with hardships, of which, it is impossible they should be insensible, and from which they must certainly wish to be delivered, cannot be valued at too high a rate, is to me incomprehensible. I am, Sir, yours, &c.

L E T T E R III.

S I R,

I SHALL, in this letter, and a few of those that immediately follow, beg leave to make a few remarks on your objections to the lights in which I have represented the dissenting interest. As *able a defender* as you think me to be *of the dissenting interest*, you are *by no means satisfied*, it seems, p. 12. *with the manner in which I have continually represented it.* As so very great an abatement is to be made on this head of the compliments you pay me, I cannot help suspecting that the whole would shrink into mere inanity, if you were to attempt as minute a discussion of every article of the various merit you ascribe to me.

You

You are greatly offended, Sir, p. 12. that I should call the dissenting interest the cause of *truth, religion, and liberty*. You think the phrase *vague, indeterminate, and even manifestly improper*. Now it appears to me, that there is a great and manifest propriety in calling the dissenting interest the cause of *truth*, if it be true that men have a right to judge and act for themselves in matters of religion, which is all that, as Dissenters, we claim, and which our opponents deny us; that it must be proper, also, to call it the cause of *religion*, if christianity gives us this right; and that it is the cause of *liberty*, if it consist in asserting this right of private judgment, independent of the control of others; and really I do not see how the man who denies these propositions can be termed a Dissenter.

Pray, Sir, do not all Protestants (for the reasons above-mentioned) agree to call the Protestant cause, as opposed to popery, the cause of truth, religion, and liberty; and is not the cause of christianity, as opposed to Heathenism, Mahometanism, &c. always denominated in the same manner.

When we assert our right to think for ourselves, and claim a liberty to pursue and discover truth, we do not pretend that we have, in all cases, succeeded in our inquiries; or that we have

have, in all respects, made a right use of our liberty. It is even possible we may be so inconsistent with ourselves, as (like our adversaries) to make use of our liberty to tie up our own hands, or at least those of our posterity.

Let us now see how far you yourself, Sir, have virtually acknowledged the dissenting interest to be the cause of truth, religion, and liberty. In p. 8. you rest the great principle of the dissenting interest upon the maxim, that *no man, or body of men, can have a right to impose articles of faith, or modes of worship upon others, and to subject those who differ from them to any kind of hardship or suffering.* You say, p. 11. *A liberty to make improvements in religion appears to me to be so evidently the unalienable right of every man, and to be of so much importance to the progress of religious knowledge, and to the interests of piety and virtue, that I should think myself fully justified in dissenting from the church of England, whatever alterations might be made in it, while it continued to require from all its members the profession of the same faith, and the observance of the same forms of worship, without allowing for the different opinions of mankind, or encouraging a spirit of inquiry and improvement.* You even say, p. 14. *that it is certainly true, that Dissenters are, from their situation, friends of liberty.* Now, dear Sir, is not this making the dissenting interest

rest the cause of religion and liberty, and almost in so many words.

You say, p. 11. that it is a material objection against the church of England, that it, in a great measure, precludes improvements in the mode of religious worship, and obliges its members to sit down contented in their present imperfect state. And you say, *ib.* that it is the peculiar privilege of the Dissenters, that they are at full liberty to make these improvements. What, now, is this, but making the dissenting interest the cause of religion and truth; and how is this cause, then, common to us all, by whatever denomination we are distinguished, p. 14. As you admit the thing, I cannot help wondering at the aversion you express to admit the name.

You are also offended, p. 18. that, in particularizing the principles of the Dissenters, I should say, that we all disclaim human authority in matters of religion, which is strictly true, and what every Dissenter, if he were interrogated, would avow. Is it not upon this maxim, that they all refuse their assent to that article of the thirty-nine, which asserts a power in man to decree rites and ceremonies in the church? Nor is it at all to the purpose to say, that some of them act inconsistent with their profession. That is what I myself have asserted again and again.

But

But pray, Sir, turn back to p. 14. and let us see whether you, who are so critical upon others, have been more exact yourself. You there say, that *the only thing by which we are distinguished as a body, is by claiming to ourselves a right of private judgment in matters of religion.* Now this appears to me to be just as generally, and as incautiously expressed, as what you censure in me. The only difference is in the turn of the expression; I saying that we disclaim the power of another, and you that we claim it to ourselves. I apprehend, therefore, that whatever you can alledge in your own vindication will equally serve for mine.

You must give me leave, however, before I quit this subject, to observe, that you judge very ill, p. 19. in making *no difference between the authority of the church of England, the decision of an assembly of divines, and the IPSA DIXIT of a Whitfield, or Wesley.* Is there no difference, then, between the force of laws, with the sanctions of pains and penalties, and that kind of influence which an opinion of a man's knowledge and virtue will give him! Upon these principles I do not see why you might not argue against the interposition of the authority of a parent in the early instruction of his children; as that cannot but tend to bias their minds in favour of his own opinions, or system of religion.

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With me there is an essential difference between these things. The influence of opinion may bind us, but the bonds are flexible; authority may yield to authority, one prejudice may give place to another, and all prejudices to the force of argument. But civil power is an inflexible thing, and is deaf to all kinds of argument and persuasion; so that truth has no chance where it prevails.

To say that no Dissenters are influenced by a blind regard to the opinions of others, would be to say they were not *men*, a thing which, with all my enthusiasm for the cause, I have not yet advanced; and what you must know I never could mean.

It is by the very same unfair construction that you load the author of the Address, p. 16. with the defence of every thing in the system and practice of *every* particular sect of Dissenters; when I dare say he would be very sorry to charge himself with the defence of the principles or practices of *any one* of them; and in several respects he has freely censured the most approved of them. But you mistook what was meant of the principles of the Dissenters *as such*, in an address to them *as such*, for the principles of *any* of them singly considered.

You

You yourself, however, say, p. 11. that it is *the peculiar privilege of Dissenters, that they are at full liberty to make improvements in religion*; and yet you mention cases, p. 19. in which you say of some Dissenters, that *their minds are far from being at liberty to enquire after truth, or to deliberate upon the expediency of different forms of worship*. Wherein, then, are you, Sir, more consistent than myself.

I am, &c.



LETTER IV.

SIR,

I AM afraid I shall have tired both you and the public, to whom you have chosen that our correspondence should be open, with my defence, in cases where none at all was necessary; and where you lie under the very same predicament with myself. I shall now attend to a charge of a more serious nature, in which I can have no pretence for bringing you in as partner in my guilt.

I find, p. 16. that I have given the greatest shock to your charity in accusing the church of England of *idolatry*. This crime you, in your great erudition, are pleased to define, to be a

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paying

paying to inferior and derived beings, knowing them to be such, those honours which are due to the supreme power ; and upon this definition you largely and ably vindicate the church of England from the charge brought against it.

You say that my *heavy charge should have some better support than positive assertions, and vehement censures ;* and pray, Sir, doth not your *new definition* of a *known term* require some other authority besides your own? You must certainly suppose that there has been such a thing as idolatry in the world, and therefore that it is a crime capable of being committed ; but I think it will require twice the stock of learning that you, Sir, are master of, to prove that any of the human race ever paid to inferior and derived beings, *knowing them to be such*, those honours that are due to the supreme power. You yourself say, p. 30. *it would require a degree of stupidity, and of impiety, scarcely to be conceived.*

This is well known not to have been the idolatry to which the Jews were so prone, and if you be at all read in the Classics (which I do not question) you must have observed, that the Greeks and Romans, in their hymns, and other acts of worship, never ascribed to their deities more powers than they really believed, or professed to believe them possessed of. The common

mon people never prevaricate in these things. You may be sure they would never have given themselves the trouble, and have been at the expence of sacrifices, and other testimonies of homage and respect to their gods, in order to procure of them such favours as they knew it was not in their power to grant. Stupid as mankind have been, this conduct would exceed every thing we have seen, or read of the most stupid of them. Yet you, Sir, in your superabundant charity, overlooking this obvious consideration, acquit, in one sentence, the whole world of the crime of idolatry. I own that my zeal for speculative opinions is inconsistent with this *perfect universal charity*, p. 31.

In the first commandment the divine being says expressly, *Thou shalt have no other gods but me*; and the violation of this command is, I believe, universally acknowledged to be, precisely the crime of idolatry. But according to your favourable construction of this crime, a man might worship three hundred gods besides the true one, provided (which, if he did it at all, he certainly would) he believed they really were gods, and were intitled to the worship he paid them. Would the priests of Baal, think you, Sir, have cut and mangled themselves as they did in his worship, if they had not believed that he was a God, and upon a level with Jehovah,

the God of Israel, with respect to the trial proposed by Elijah. How shockingly uncharitable then was it to destroy those poor worshippers of Baal, when they were no idolators, but only acted conscientiously, according to their real persuasion.

In *Maximus Tyrius*, Diff. 38. you will see an ingenious defence of the idolatry of the Greeks, Egyptians, and all other nations, upon principles similar to yours. But perhaps you have been there before me.

Finding nothing satisfactory in your defence, I here again repeat the charge of *idolatry* against the established church of England, and all the established churches in the world, in which divine worship is paid to any other being than *the one God and father of all, even the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ*: And till you, Sir, can produce an established church that is free from what I, and all writers but yourself, call *idolatry*, I must re-assert (how unworthy soever it may be *of a liberal and enlarged mind*, p. 31.) that among Dissenters only, is the worship of the one living and true God known. That some Dissenters are not equally idolaters, is what you know I never asserted, or believed, and therefore you had no occasion to take the pains you have done to prove that they are.

I am, &c.

LETTER V.

S I R,

AS you seem to be so exceedingly offended at my accusing the Church of England of Idolatry, and make so very light of the matter, I shall endeavour to consider this crime more particularly, and to state my idea of its nature and effects with some precision.

We find in the old testament that something, which was termed *Idolatry*, was exceedingly offensive to the true God, and that the most awful judgments were denounced against those who were guilty of it. Now it appears to me that we should think meanly of the divine being, to suppose that, in this case, he was solely concerned about what we may call his own rights, and the just claim he had to the homage of his creatures. As in all his dispensations, so, no doubt, in this, his principal object was our happiness; and we may conclude that it was chiefly for the sake of mankind themselves that such provision was made to prevent their falling into idolatry.

This crime, therefore, we may safely infer, had some bad moral tendency; and we find, in fact, that the species of idolatry to which the oriental nations

nations were prone, was always attended with the most abominably lewd and cruel rites; and therefore could not fail to deprave men's hearts and lead them to form the worst habit, in their conduct in life. The idolatry of the Greeks and Romans was, in a great measure, chargeable with the same dangerous tendency, as also that of the Gauls and Britons; whereas the idolatry that now subsists in the world, is for the most part innocent, in comparison with them; which may be the reason why the divine being is pleased to bear with it so much longer.

The idolatry of those who pay divine worship to Jesus Christ, as a being *the same in substance, and equal in power and glory* with his father, must be acknowledged not to be of so fatal a tendency as those kinds of idolatry of which we read in the scriptures; but it is not therefore innocent, or not hurtful. Indeed it is hardly possible that any false notion concerning God, and especially a notion so very false as this is, can be so. When it is apprehended that instead of *one*, there are *three* beings, to whom the perfections of deity are referred, the imagination of man will always make a partition of divine attributes among them; and in no one of them will there be that union of venerable and amiable attributes, which we ascribe to the *one only living and true God*; and as the mind of man cannot contemplate more
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than one object at the same time, it cannot, with these notions, be possessed of that mixture of reverence and love, of which the sentiments of true devotion consist.

From these principles it will follow, that while the *Father*, *Son*, and *Holy Ghost* are equally regarded as God, one of them will be thought to be possessed of one set of attributes, and another of a different set; one of them will be imagined to be of one disposition, and another of another, just as the Heathens conceived concerning their several deities. And I appeal to the conviction of the Athanasians themselves, whether, in their ideas, there be not something more stern and inflexible in the character of the Father, than of the Son; also, notwithstanding they ascribe all divine attributes to the Father, whether, leaving the Son out of the question, something peculiarly amiable and engaging would not be wanting in what would remain of the divine being; and likewise whether, leaving out the Father and Son, the *Spirit* alone, according to their customary ideas of his nature and attributes, would be equal to the works of creation, providence, and redemption. If this be a just representation, there is nothing that the Athanasians really conceive of as *one* being, to whom they ascribe all divine perfections, of justice, goodness, and mercy. I scruple not to use the term *being*, instead of per-

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son, because, as the distinction is allowed to be incomprehensible, they are, in this respect, the very same thing.

It is in consequence of this notion, of Christ being that divine person who is the most gracious and accessible to us, that, contrary to the whole tenor of scripture, even prayers are addressed to him. In that celebrated treatise of Thomas a Kempis, *de imitatione Christi*, Christ is almost every where synonymous to God; the Moravians hardly ever address any other; and in the ^{Ang}liturgy of the church of England Christ is evidently the principal, if not the sole object of divine worship: for, though, in the introduction to this part of the service, all the three persons are distinctly invoked, yet in the body of it, Christ alone is expressly referred to; as in the phrases, *By the mystery of thy holy incarnation; by thy holy nativity and circumcision; by thy baptism, fasting, and temptation, &c. &c. &c.* and it concludes with an invocation of no other than Christ, under different appellations; as *Son of God, we beseech thee to hear us; O lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, grant us thy peace; O Christ hear us; Christ have mercy upon us; Lord have mercy upon us*, repeated. When the Son is thus considered as the object of our petitions, and the source of all blessing, the Father will be neglected. He may be feared, but he cannot be loved.

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To a mind accustomed to think in this manner, the motives to virtue that are derived from the imitation of God often lose the whole of their effect. This consideration is even sometimes unfavourable to real goodness; for certainly it would not be to the advantage of any man's character, to resemble God the father, according to the ideas that some persons have of him; ideas which they could never have entertained of him, if, by dividing the godhead, they had not divested him of some of his essential attributes.

This, I say, will be the case with those who are practically and habitually Athanasians; who, by frequently thinking and disputing upon the subject, do, as it were, realize the scheme in their minds: for I consider the generality of christians as no more than *nominal* Athanasians. If they be questioned, they will answer that Christ is god; but at the same time, the only proper object of their worship is God the father; and in fact, they have an idea of him *as the supreme being*, even with respect to the Son, and Spirit; and also as a being who is gracious and merciful, independent of any regard to Christ. If they read the scriptures more than controversial writings, they cannot help conceiving in this manner; and therefore their speculative opinions do them very little harm. Still, however, their nominal be-
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lief of this doctrine contributes to fix the charge of idolatry upon the christian world, and to prevent the conversion of the Jews, Mahommedans and Heathens ; which is a consideration that well deserves the most serious attention of all christians.

Let those who think it innocent to pay divine worship to Jesus Christ, consider the many passages of scripture, in which the worship of all inferior and derived beings, though the best and most exalted, is expressly forbidden. Not only doth our Saviour say, *Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve*, when he was tempted to worship the devil ; but St. John was severely reprov'd by an angel when he fell down before him, though we cannot imagine that he meant to pay him divine honours. See, says he, *thou do it not ; for I am thy fellow servant, of thy brethren the prophets. Worship God*. Rev. xxii. 9. St. Paul also represents it as a great corruption of christianity, that men through a voluntary, or affected, *humility* should worship angels, Col. i. 18. This he mentions as the consequence of their *being vainly puffed up of their fleshy mind*.

If we could not distinctly perceive any moral evil in this species of idolatry (which is, as much as any other, a violation of the rights of the only true God, and robbing him of that glory which
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he will not give to another) we might clearly infer, from the abovementioned passages of scripture, that there *is* moral evil in it, and that the practice is sinful and dangerous.

I am, &c.

LETTER VI.

S I R,

YOU think, p. 20. that the author of the *Address* expects too much from Dissenters, when he looks to them only for a reformation of the abuses of popery. But you grossly mistake his meaning, when you suppose that he had any idea of their doing this by any immediate effect upon the established church. What he plainly appears to have meant, is, that those who are unfettered by establishments have their minds most at liberty to pursue the investigation of truth; that the general progress of knowledge will enlighten the minds of the members of the establishment; and that the moment any of them entertain sentiments different from those of the established system, he in fact *is*, and ought to *appear*, a *dissenter*; and especially, that no establishment, as such, ever voluntarily reformed itself: because this supposes the consent of the majority of the body, who will always be interested in the continuance of every present system,

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be it ever so *corrupt*, or *absurd*, provided it be a *gainful* one. And till you, Sir, can produce an instance of an establishment so reforming itself, all your theoretical speculations, so curiously displayed in the form of *queries*, p. 21. will not deserve the least attention. It is not *possibilities*, or imagined *probabilities*, but *facts* that are wanting for this purpose.

As to the comparisons I have occasionally drawn between the kinds and degrees of knowledge, to be found among the Dissenters and the members of the established church, I am sorry that I can see no reason to retract any thing I have said. I have the testimony of persons not unacquainted with real life, and the world, and especially among the most intelligent of the clergy themselves, for what I have advanced; and I appeal to every man who is a competent judge, whether he have not a full conviction of it. This I mean as a full answer (and it is all that I can say by way of answer) to a great part of your pamphlet. A detail of particulars is impossible to be given.

To show you, Sir, that I am not altogether singular in every thing that I have advanced concerning the English clergy, I shall quote the words of a man well acquainted both with human nature, and *real life*, and, withall, the most bene-

benevolent, the most candid, and, in all respects, the wisest, and most excellent of mankind.

“ I chuse to speak to what falls under the observation of all serious attentive persons in this kingdom. The superior clergy are, in general, ambitious, and eager in the pursuit of riches; flatterers of the great, and subservient to party interest; negligent of their own immediate charges, and also of the inferior clergy, and their immediate charges. The inferior clergy imitate their superiors, and, in general, take little more care of their parishes than barely what is necessary to avoid the censure of the law. And the clergy of all ranks are, in general, either ignorant, or, if they do apply, it is rather to profane learning, to philosophical or political matters, than to the study of the scriptures, of the oriental languages, of the Fathers, and ecclesiastical authors, and of the writings of devout men of different ages of the church. I say this is, in general, the case, i. e. far the greater part of the clergy, of all ranks in this kingdom, are of this kind.” *Hartley's Observations on Man*, Vol. I. p. 450.

What writer of credit ever passed the same censure upon the body of dissenting ministers, degenerate as we are? You, Sir, even affect to ridicule them for their attachment to those very studies, which this great man laments that the clergy paid no attention to. If

If you will look into the late Archbishop *Secker's charges to the clergy*, you will find many passages, which might have been quoted in support of almost every thing that I have advanced concerning the state of the church of England. He would not have joined with you, in saying, p. 40. that my censures *are very roundly asserted but GRATIS DICTUM all*.

In your remarks upon my saying, that, with respect to reading and knowledge of every kind, *Dissenters are sinking fast to a level with the members of the established church* (in which, contrary to common sense, and the most obvious rules of interpretation, you suppose that I meant, not what I necessarily must have meant, those kinds of knowledge in which only I had asserted that the Dissenters had the superiority, but knowledge of every other kind too, including these in which I had said the Dissenters were always inferior) you say, p. 8. *Nothing can be more amazing, than that this should ever have dropped from the pen of Dr. Priestley*. But pray, Sir, what else could be expected from a person of my inattention to real life, vehemence of temper, and precipitation? If I could have quoted any other work of yours, I might, in return, have expressed my wonder at so very idle and unfair a remark; but as you refer to no other, I cannot say that I wonder at all.

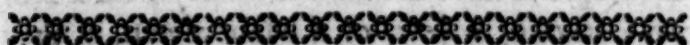
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Notwithstanding what I have written on the behalf of the Dissenters, and their principles, I am not that bigot that you seem to take me to be. Satisfied as I am with my own principles and conduct, I hope that I shall always make allowance for the prejudices and mistakes of others. To them I must appear prejudiced and mistaken, and I hope they will make the same allowance for me. With my known zeal for the dissenting interest, I have always been, and I hope always shall be happy in my intimacies with clergymen of the established church; and should not scruple to have the same intimacy with a Roman Catholic, a Jew, or a Mahometan, if they were men of sense, and had a taste for science, or any branch of literature, that could furnish topics on which we might improve and entertain one another. I consider the members even of the popish establishment, that *mystery of iniquity and abomination*, in a very different light from that establishment itself; and I have the highest opinion both of the heads and hearts of many of the former, though I regard the latter with indignation and contempt.

With generous minds; such comparisons as I have drawn will only excite a generous and manly emulation; and to suppose, with you, that they can produce any unfavourable effect, is to cast a much greater reflection upon the members
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of the establishment than I have any where done. If, however, after all, I were convinced, that, urged by what has been advanced by the adversaries of the Dissenters, I have sometimes expressed myself with incautious warmth, so as to have offended but one truly sensible and worthy clergyman, I should be sincerely sorry for it, and ask his pardon. But, indeed, I am apprehensive, that I have given much more offence to more than one species of Dissenters, than to any members of the established church.

I am, &c.



LETTER VII.

S I R,

I MUST take the liberty to trespass upon your patience longer than usual in this letter, as in it I propose no less than to examine the whole *strength* and *consistency* of the new principles of the dissenting interest contained in your performance.

Finding both the old mode of defending the dissenting interest, as the cause of truth, religion, and liberty, and the additional argument against the constitution of the established church, as enjoining the practice of idolatry, must be equally
given

given up; and finding that you, Sir, notwithstanding the great concessions you have made, profess yourself a Dissenter, and even *glory in the name*, p. 10. I was willing to learn from you the *true and solid principles*, ib. of our dissent. As you are pleased to *strike out* so many of the *old lights*, I had no doubt but you would *strike out* some *new ones* too; but whether it be owing to my habit of *precipitation*, or some other cause, I cannot say, that I have yet been able, from your pamphlet, to supply myself with any better, or more consistent principles of dissent than I have been used to rest the cause upon.

You strongly disclaim *a right in others to impose articles of faith and modes of worship*, p. 8. and yet, in the next page, you seem to waver in this maxim, *on which* you suppose that *the conduct of the Dissenters may be vindicated, against all the attacks of subtle reasoning, or of ridicule and contempt*, p. 8; for you only say, that *it may, perhaps, be asserted, that, in the situation of the old Puritans, they might have been excused, and even justified, in making a resolute stand against the imposing spirit of their rulers, even though the things themselves, which they required of them, had been liable to no considerable objection; so that perhaps also, since it is a dubious case, they were not to be excused or justified, in making the resolute stand they did; and still less would they have*

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been

been to be excused, if their situation had been different, and the things imposed had been liable to *no objection at all*: for, according to you it is only possible that they might have been excused if the things had been liable to no considerable objection. Indeed you express yourself with so much caution, that one may rather infer, that you disapproved of their conduct, since you only say that perhaps, *they might have been excused*, not that they *can* be excused.

According to my principles, this *perhaps* is entirely out of the question. It is also a matter of indifference to me, whether the things imposed be liable to *no considerable objection*, or to *no objection at all*. In either case, the great principle of religious liberty, is absolutely, and equally given up by the least submission: for it is an acknowledgment of the right to require it. Indeed you yourself must have thought so, when you said, p. 10, that *if men are persuaded they can worship their maker with greater propriety and advantage, they are under a moral obligation to separate from the establishment*.

Though your *style*, Sir, is very pleasing, I do not think your *method* the happiest in the world; as I find some difficulty in picking out, from the different parts of your performance, what are the distinct reasons for your dissent. However,

ever, I shall trace them as well as I can. In p. 10, I find you say, that *there are many things in the constitution, doctrine, and worship of the church of England, which are liable to considerable objections*; but this is not saying that they are *invincible ones*. I myself, and I doubt not you too, have very considerable objections to many things in the situation of the dissenters, and yet we continue among them.

You also say, p. 11, *It is, moreover, with me, a material objection against the church of England, that it, in a great measure, precludes improvements in the mode of religious worship, and obliges its members to sit down contented in its present imperfect state*. But according to your own confession, and with respect to this very case, you say, p. 23, that *there is a wide difference between speculation and experience, and that freedom of enquiry and sentiment prevails as much among the laity, and even the clergy of the established church, as among dissenters*. If this now be the case, and the dissenting interest be no more the cause of religion, liberty, and truth, than the cause of the church of England, I do not see that your objections to the establishment can be so very considerable, or material as you pretend them to be; and I cannot but think that they might be put in a fair way of being removed. If there be nothing but *speculation* in favour of the dissenting interest,

while there is *experience* in favour of the church of England; what wise man will hesitate which to prefer. Your own opinion of speculation in particular, which I shall consider afterwards, I should not think to be such, as that you would esteem it a better guide than experience.

I can easily conceive, that, upon the same principles on which you professedly vindicate the conformity of clergymen, your friends might vindicate yours, viz. on those of *benevolence*, p. 58. To use your own words, *they might think it right, in you, to submit to the usual forms of admission into the church, which it certainly is not in your power to alter, rather than give up (or not gain) the useful character of a clergyman.* They might say, that *the difficulties you would labour under in the church of England, are to be met with even among dissenters*, p. 59, *where, in order to be acceptable and useful, a man is under a necessity, if not of subscribing to articles, yet of conforming, in a certain degree, to the customs, opinions, and prejudices of mankind.* They would certainly look upon such conformity to be lawful, when it would afford you an opportunity of being more useful to mankind, than you would have had a probability of being without it.

On these suppositions, you imagine that the ministers of the established church may be vindicated

dedicated without any impeachment of their integrity, since it is not necessary that these maxims be just, but that to them they appear to be so. For my part, I do not see how a man is less guilty of telling a lie, or of perjuring himself, if he asserts a known untruth, notwithstanding he may propose to gain some good end by it: and it appears to me, that there must be something wrong in a man's mind, if he can persuade himself that, in this case, solemn lying, or perjury is lawful; and I own that I have no idea of a more formal or explicit act of falshood, than a subscription to articles of religion which a man does not believe.

Upon the face of your apology, it appears to be exactly the case of *doing evil that good may come*, and though you should have read the scriptures with no other view than to *pick out moral sentences*, p. 37, I presume that you are so well acquainted with them, that I do not need to continue the quotation.

Upon the whole, I cannot help thinking that your mode of vindicating conformity to the church of England, will as well vindicate conformity to popery; and it appears to me, that the present is no proper time for relaxing the obligations of truth in this case. There are so many

biasses on that side, that a wise man, will rather chuse to throw his weight into the other scale.

To make myself more thoroughly acquainted with your principles of the dissenting interest, I next turn to what you say on the subject of *occasional conformity*, p. 55, where I find you are of opinion, that *a man is not to consider what anti-christian errors he may countenance, in any place of worship, but where he has the clearest prospect of personal improvement and pleasure*. In this maxim, Sir, I believe you have the merit of being quite original; for I do not find that it was at all known, either to any of the reformers from popery, or to our forefathers the old Puritans. If I be at all acquainted with their history, their *first* consideration was that mode of worship which was most agreeable to the scriptures and the will of God; their *personal improvement* was but a *secondary* consideration with them, and their *pleasure* no consideration at all.

When their favourite places of worship were shut up, they thought it their duty to attend public worship in those places which they most approved, provided there was nothing *sinful* in the service; and upon this principle they frequented the established churches. But though they might have gone as *spectators* of the method in which the worship of God is conducted by any
of

of the human race, they did not think with you, p. 56, that *they might innocently join in publick worship with any set of christians*, and much less with *Jews or Mahometans*. This would have appeared to them, however it may appear to you, p. 56, *exceedingly alarming and dreadful*.

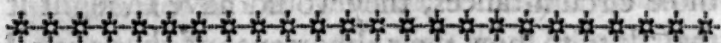
To communicate with the church of Rome would have appeared to them an act of idolatry, and to frequent the Turkish mosque, though there should have been no christian church in the country, would have appeared to them a renouncing of christianity. They would as soon have changed the Lord's-supper for circumcision. In those circumstances, they would have thought it their duty to show their abhorrence of the national worship, and even to be singular in such a cause, though at the risque of every thing that was dear to them, and of life itself.

With respect to the church of Rome, though you may call it a *christian church*. the old reformers and Puritans would have applied to themselves the words of that awful voice from heaven, in the book of Revelation, xviii. 4. *Come out of her my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.*

As to the countenance that a man may give to *antichristian*

tichristian errors, by his example, in these cases, you say, p. 55, that it is not to be considered, because it has very little influence, indeed, that his example in this case can have. Now this appears to me to be a very dangerous maxim. Every man has more or less influence, and it is of great importance that every man should attend to it, and govern his conduct by it. Of the two, therefore, I would rather chuse to give a man an idea of his importance in this respect, being greater, rather than of its being less than it really is; since a sense of dignity and importance is a great incentive to worthy actions.

I am, &c.



LETTER VIII.

S I R,

THE pains you have taken to smoothe over the business of subscription, to articles of faith which a man does not believe, have led me to reflect a little more upon the subject, as an action of a *moral nature*; and as the result of my reflections is a good deal different from that of yours, I am willing to lay it before you.

Actions that are alike morally wrong, as being a transgression of the rule of our duty, are by no means

means equal with respect to malignity ; and they are so far from being *similar* in their nature, that some of them are even diametrically opposite to others. It may not be possible to define or arrange them all with perfect accuracy, but I think we may easily mark the following distinct classes.

First, there are the vices of drunkenness and lewdness, the object of which is the gratification of the sensual appetites. These vices are in themselves very consistent with the strictest regard to honesty, veracity, and humanity ; though if there should be no other method of gratifying the senses, but at the expence of honesty, or humanity, these might yield in the contest.

Another set of vices springs from an immoderate selfishness, or an excessive thirst for riches and power ; which is perfectly consistent with personal sobriety ; but frequently produces fraud, dissimulation, injustice, and cruelty.

A third set consists of the vices of profaneness, as cursing and swearing, &c. which are perfectly consistent with sobriety, honesty, and humanity.

If I were to attempt an estimate of the degrees of *malignity* peculiar to these different kinds or classes of vice, I would say that the last appears

pears to me to be the least dangerous ; because it generally arises from a mere thoughtless habit, and gratifies no natural passion, but only a foolish notion of talking and behaving like a man of spirit, a notion that may easily be corrected.

The first mentioned set of vices I should rank in the next place, with respect to malignity and danger. Age will, of course, make all sensual gratifications of less value ; and if a man can be brought to think or reflect at all, he may be made ashamed of sensual excesses.

But the class of vices which I mentioned in the second place, or those which arise from an inordinate regard to *self-interest*, are of the most malignant nature, and withal the most incurable. Self-interest is a principle that is known to grow stronger to the very latest period of human life ; and whereas the former set of vices may be said to affect the body, these vitiate the soul itself, and corrupt the very source of moral conduct. The vices of sensuality are such as a man is most apt to be betrayed into when he is off his guard ; but greater coolness, and presence of mind only enable the selfish and fraudulent to deceive and ruin men more securely and successfully. Besides those vices chiefly affect a man's self, but these injure other persons.

Now

Now I scruple not to say, that, in my opinion, a deliberate subscription to articles of faith which a man does not believe (by which I mean a subscription to them as the means of getting a livelihood, or raising a fortune) is of this most dangerous nature; and let those who pretend to do it as a means of placing themselves in a situation in which they may do the greatest good, examine themselves well, and be *very sure* that they are not secretly influenced by some other motive.

A man who can thus tell a deliberate lye, and really think it justifiable, must, on the same principle, be able to justify any actions of a similar nature, and such as have the same object; and thus a general rule or maxim will be formed, that may lead him to deceive and impose upon mankind in the most essential respects.

If he be not able to justify such a subscription to his own conscience, and be of a truly ingenuous disposition, he has done an action that he cannot but reflect upon with pain and remorse as long as he lives; or, not being able either to justify his conduct, or to repent of it, and make the proper satisfaction, his mind may become, as it were, callous, or hardened, so that he shall be quite desperate, and capable of any moral transgression. Some, however, may possibly think to compensate for the want of one virtue,
by

by a greater attention to others, and be more zealous in the discharge of their duty in other respects; but in proportion as this conduct invigorates the power of conscience, it must make them the more exquisitely sensible of their former guilt.

With those who subscribe without thinking at all of the nature of the action, the case is very different. Subscription, in them, is an action of no malignity, and has no moral consequences. Such persons have done nothing that they reproach themselves for; and what appears to others to be a manifest lye, or equivocation, has no tendency to make them lye or equivocate in any other case. Subscription is with them such a vice as those are guilty of who use a trivial oath, without knowing it to be one, and it does not tend to make them prophane in other respects. It must be observed, however, that no man can be said to be excusable, who can do a thing of so solemn a nature, as a subscription to articles of faith without consideration, or taking pains to inform himself concerning the nature of the action.

To what is advanced above, it is necessary to add another case, which is that of those who subscribed when they were not aware of the nature of the action; but who, upon being better informed, would
not

not repeat the subscription for the sake of any preferment whatever. These are certainly some of the most worthy and excellent of the clergy. Having no view to advance themselves in the church, they assiduously apply themselves to the duties of their station, and are the farthest in the world from any thing that approaches to falsehood or prevarication in their conduct in life.

So long as such persons can consider their past subscription as having no relation to their present situation, to which they attained by means of it; and so long as they can consider their continuance in the church, and their use of the English liturgy as no virtual repetition of their subscription, all may be pretty well. But it appears to me, that persons of ingenuous dispositions can hardly be without scruples on these heads, and that these scruples must sometimes make them uneasy.

To others it appears evident, that the intention of the legislature was, that all church preferments should be confined to those who should *continue* to hold certain opinions, and not those who only *once held* them; and that if the present incumbents be not the persons intended by the law for the offices and emoluments they ~~profess~~, they have no more right to them, than a fellow of a college has to a fellowship, after he has taken a wife

wife. But perhaps it may be replied, that neither is a fellow of a college under any obligation to report his marriage, nor a clergyman his change of sentiments.

I shall conclude with observing, that it becomes every christian to put the most candid construction upon the conduct of others. If we think that any persons, through the influence of their situations, see things in what appears to us a wrong light, and in consequence of it, act in a manner not the most favourable to the general interests of christianity, let us be thankful that we ourselves have not been brought into the same temptation.

A variety of other considerations on this subject I do not mention in this place, as they have been urged by others, and by myself else where.

I am, &c.



LETTER IX.

S I R,

YOU seem so much displeased with what the author of the *Free Address* has said, by way of exhortation to the more opulent Dissenters, to a liberal support of the cause, that you
think

think it necessary, as you say, p. 50, to give this subject a distinct consideration; and yet I do not see wherein you differ from that author. You say, p. 50, It is doubtless reasonable, that dissenting ministers should be provided for, in such a manner as shall raise them above indigence and contempt, and enable them to make an appearance in the world, suitable to their character and station, &c. You even say, p. 52, that the provision for ministers in poor places, and the education of persons for the ministry require, perhaps, a greater degree of attention than is at present paid to them; and you even propose, p. 51, more than he doth, viz. some kind of security for their comfortable subsistence.

Notwithstanding all this, you can say, p. 52, We need not fear that the cause will sink for want of a proper support, and that, in case of persecution, the present race of Dissenters would grudge no expence that the exigence of the times might require.

Besides quoting your own acknowledgments in the last paragraph, are you so unacquainted with the state of things among us, as not to know, that many ministers and their families are now actually starving, that many places of worship are actually shut up, and that many more cannot be kept open any longer, for want of a necessary support; in other words, for want of that being done which the exigence of the present times requires?

quires? And how is this to be remedied, when, in p. 53, you think, that, in our present circumstances, *the more opulent Dissenters are under no kind of obligation to deny themselves the innocent gratifications and amusement of life on that account.* Really, Sir, you seem to expect great supplies, but you have provided no funds that are at all adequate to them. You must hold the cause very cheap indeed, or think it already very well provided for, if you think that a man is under no obligation to deny himself the *amusements* of life for the support of it.

You are offended, I perceive, p. 62, with the author of the address, for saying that it is *CETERIS PARIBUS*, *more probable that we are the disciples of Christ, if we are frowned upon by the powers of the world, than if we have free access to all the emoluments of it;* and that, *in a situation in every respect favourable to the pursuits, and enjoyments of this life, it would not be easy for a man to attain any thing like a satisfactory conviction, that he had the proper temper and disposition of a christian.* Now I thought it had been universally acknowledged, that a man has the best chance of knowing both himself and his friends in adversity, and and that in prosperity he has much less chance of knowing either.

But the consequence you draw from the above doctrine

doctrine appears to me the most extraordinary. *If this be true*, you say, p. 62. *it must certainly be the duty of every christian, who is so unfortunate as to be placed in circumstances which do not expose him to any considerable hardships, voluntarily to subject himself to trials and persecutions.* Now, I see no such inference: but as you have no great opinion of *Logic* or *Metaphysics*, it cannot be expected that you should have the same advantage over me in drawing logical conclusions, that you would have had in *declamation*. I believe it is generally allowed by christians, and all who believe in the doctrine of a providence, that all the afflictions of life, the loss of a child for instance, are, or may be, of great use to them: but that it is, therefore, a man's duty to kill a favourite child ~~every~~ now and then, in order to get his full share of affliction, and of the benefit of it, is a conclusion that few persons, I believe, are in the least aware of; and what they would hardly be made to understand, or act upon, though they were urged by all your powers of declamation, aided by an equal skill in logic. I am, &c.

LETTER X.

S I R,

YOU have been so very particular in your account of the studies proper to prepare a
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person for the christian ministry, and in describing some *traits* of the ministerial character, that I dare say you meant to draw my particular attention, and that of the public, upon it.

You begin with complaining, p. 34. that in all the academies you have heard of, far the greater part of the time devoted to preparatory studies is employed in going through a long series of inquiries and debates, relating to the refinements and subtleties of metaphysics, or to subjects of theological controversy, and in turning over dry and tedious volumes of annotations, commentaries, and expositions, to fix the precise meaning of difficult texts of scripture. This you are pleased to call a laborious, and, in a great measure, a fruitless course of study; and you say, that, as the case now stands, it is only those who have good sense and taste enough to pursue, of their own accord, more useful and polite accomplishments, than they are likely to acquire by listening to the debates of learned metaphysicians, theologians, and critics, who can be expected to come into the world without any disagreeable peculiarities, and with the proper qualifications for the character in which they are to appear.

Afterwards, p. 44. you suppose that I mean by religious and scriptural knowledge, for which I commend the Dissenters, the endless debates and useless distinctions of polemical divines. You talk,
Sir,

Sir, p. 37. of the *whole art of composition*, in which you would have students for the ministry trained, and you seem to avail yourself of some part of it here, by inserting in your charge such *epitbets* as cannot fail to enforce the sentence you intend to pass. If I thought these studies *useless*, I should certainly agree with you in condemning them. If you had been a logician, you would of yourself have perceived the folly of amusing yourself and the public with such *identical propositions*.

From the general spirit and obvious tendency of what you say on this subject, it seems to be very nearly your opinion, that the less pains a student for the christian ministry takes to understand the scriptures, or to get a critical knowledge of them (and by *critical* must be meant a *just* and *accurate* knowledge of them) the better; and that it is more suitable to his character to be a *fine gentleman*, than a *learned divine*. Now it appears to me, that there would be just the same propriety in dissuading a young gentleman at any of the inns of court, from giving his time to *dry and tedious law books*; and I dare say you could have been just as eloquent upon one case as the other.

But really, Sir, I do not see that there is any need to sacrifice your favourite object of making

your minister a *fine gentleman*, by making him a *scholar* at the same time. One branch of knowledge is just as consistent, or inconsistent, with this as another, and I do not see that rusticity of manners has any nearer affinity with *logic* or *metaphysics*, than it has with *natural philosophy*, or even with *philosophical criticism*, or a just taste for the *Belles Lettres*, the professors of which have often been the rudest of mankind. Besides, the critical study of the *classics* is not less dry and tedious than the critical study of the *scriptures*, and you have heavy commentators in both cases.

You are pleased, indeed, to admit the study of the scriptures to be a *secondary object*, p. 36. but you say that *students for the ministry will allow them a degree of attention equal to their importance, if they carefully pursue a few of the best books on these topics* (as you call them.) Now by a *few* I presume you cannot mean more than *half a dozen*, or at most *half a score*, light duodecimo's; and I doubt not you would have them elegantly bound, gilt, and lettered; to give them, as much as possible, the appearance of light summer reading.

You are pleased, also, p. 37. to advise the reading of the scriptures, *along with the best moral writings, antient and modern, with a view to collect and arrange the most just and striking observations,*

ations, sentiments, &c. which occur on the several heads of morality, in order to furnish them with a stock of materials for their future compositions.

Upon the whole you seem to consider the composition and delivery of sermons to be the whole business of a minister; and in this I am far from agreeing with you. Your whole scheme appears to me to be calculated to form a *declaimer*, but by no means a *divine*, or *christian minister*. To form these characters much more use must be made of the scriptures, than there is any provision for in your scheme of education. Indeed, you seem to have so little use for the scriptures, that I cannot help thinking, that when Mr. Venn shall proceed to the ceremony of *burning his bible*, you will not be the most interested spectator present.

As you make so little use of the study of the scriptures, I do not wonder that you did not recommend a particular study of Jewish and christian antiquities, and an acquaintance with the early christian writers (I suppose you would start at the very name of the *Fathers*) yet these are studies that, *dry* and *tedious* as you may think them, are, in my opinion, well worth the pursuit of a minister of the gospel.

As you seem to have intended to comprehend

in your *six articles* every thing necessary, and even particularly useful in the furniture of a christian minister, I wish you had taken some notice of proper methods to cultivate a serious and devout temper of mind, and thoroughly to im-bide the genuine spirit of christianity; that, having, withall, a stock of christian literature, he might be *prepared for every good word and work.*

It is possible, Sir, (now that I recollect some other parts of your piece) that you might be apprehensive, that these severe studies, and this serious disposition would be in some danger of interfering with the *polite accomplishments*, on which you lay so much stress, and those *amusements* of ministers to which you wish, p. 45. the laity among the Dissenting had fewer objections than they have. Of those you have been pleased to specify, p. 43. *the diversions of music and dancing, frequenting theatrical entertainments, enjoying the exercise of hunting, &c. &c.*

Seriously, Sir, I cannot help wishing that, instead of those two *et cetera's*, you had mentioned a few more particulars, that we might have had some notion where we were to stop in this easy progress. As you have suppressed the particulars, some other person may possibly imagine that one of these *et cetera's* was meant for a *laced coat*, and the other for a *ruffled shirt*. It may be thought, that

that, in order to be consistent, a young minister of the polite accomplishments you describe, and who has divested himself of every other singularity, ought to be equipped with them; for as these things are *innocent in the people*, they must, according to your general maxim, p. 44. *be so in the minister.*

But says St. Paul, *All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient*; and this expedience must ever depend upon the sentiments and prejudices of others, and not upon the nature of the things themselves. It is possible that you may have given so much attention to this new subject of *human life*, that you have had but little to bestow on the good old subject of *human nature*.

I have been exceedingly desirous to discover the place of your education, from your performance, but hitherto have puzzled myself to no purpose. I only conclude that you must be a gentleman of some fortune, who have been educated along with ministers at some of our academies. I once thought I had got a pretty good scent, but I was thrown out again, by what you say about the teaching of metaphysics. *In all the academies for the education of ministers that I have heard of, you say, p. 34, by far the greater part of the three or four years which are devoted*

to preparatory studies are employed in going through a long series of enquires and debates, relating to the refinements and subtleties of metaphysics, or to subjects of theological controversy. Now this description corresponds to no academy that I have yet heard of. In none of them that I am acquainted with, are there more than a very few lectures given on the subject of *metaphysics*, properly so called, *i. e.* *ontology*; and the attention that is paid to other studies that have the same general object, viz. teaching an accurate distinction of our ideas, and precision in the use of words, as the signs of ideas, appears to me to be little enough, considering their very great importance. I should have thought that a gentleman of your taste would have spoken with more respect of the subject of Mr Lock's celebrated *Essay on the human understanding*. If the subject of that excellent and valuable book be not what you mean by *metaphysics*, I should be glad to know what you do mean by that term. Besides, before you set aside the study of metaphysics, you should consider, that the modern deists make use of arguments that are exceedingly subtle and metaphysical; and should not a christian minister be so armed, as to be able to contend with them at their own weapons?

Whatever place may have had the honour to boast of your education, I cannot say that I perceive

ceive the least trace of your having had the same *Alma Mater* with myself. Nor can I think you have so much as heard of another academy among the Dissenters, the constitution of which I particularly admire, and where you would find a plan of education actually reduced to practice infinitely superior, in my opinion, to that which you plume yourself so much upon sketching out in theory. And there, in the direction of the studies of ministers, you will find a man, who, to the learning and dignity of a tutor, joins the ease of a friend, and the affection of a father.

When, in p. 40. you represent the tutors, in *the best of our academies*, expressing their *hope that they have reformed the things you mention indifferently with them*, and you say, *I have only to reply,*

O reform them altogether,

You give me (exclusive of the attempt at a rhetorical figure) an idea of *the wisdom of twenty*, with the *air of fourscore*. And when I review the whole stock of your notions concerning the dissenting interest, and dissenting ministers, I cannot help expressing myself in a similar manner.

I am, &c.

LET-

LETTER XI.

S I R,

WHETHER your patience be exhausted or not, I cannot tell; but I assure you, I begin to be weary myself. I shall, therefore, make all possible dispatch with what remains of the subject of our correspondence.

You seem to have pleased yourself so much with an ideal method of conducting *reforms*, that I dare say you would be disappointed if I took no notice of it. It is your opinion, it seems, Sir, p. 68, (founded, no doubt, on a perfect acquaintance with *real life*) that *in all direct and open attacks on the errors and prejudices of mankind, we meet with two great, nay almost insuperable difficulties; and that the only thing that is practicable, is to suffer their errors and prejudices to die away without notice.* I conclude, therefore, that no controversial writings would ever have the sanction of your *imprimatur*; and that had you had the direction of the press, such books as *Clark on the Trinity*, *Hoadley on the Sacrament*, and many others, which have generally been thought to have done good service to the cause of truth, would never have seen the light; and that the *Theological Repository*, which has the same object, would soon be shut up.

At

At your tribunal, I conclude that the conduct of Wickliffe, Hus, and Luther, would have been severely censured; and even the humorous writings of Erasmus must not have been heard of; for *ridicule is notice*. I wish, Sir, (not to teize you with many examples) you would inform the public, what, in your opinion, would now have been the state of christianity, if the errors and abuses of popery had been suffered to die away *without notice*; or what would have been the state of religion in general, if the divine being had pursued the same plan.

As you mention only *two* great and almost insuperable difficulties, in making direct and open attacks on the errors and prejudices of mankind, I hope it will not detain us long if I briefly consider them.

To my very great surprize I find the first of them, p. 68. to be *our being far from absolutely certain that what we apprehend to be truth, is so in reality*. Now this would appear to me to belong to the class of the difficulties we meet with in *coming at* truth ourselves, and not to those we have to fear in *propagating* it among others.

What you say upon this subject is so very little, and so very general, that it is impossible to answer it. But I think you lay the foundation of universal scepticism, in asserting, p. 68. that
there

there is so much fallacy in human reasoning, that, excepting only with regard to self-evident, and primary truths, which the mind receives as soon as they are proposed, we must, after all our speculations, remain in some degree of doubt and uncertainty. The truths excepted are exceeding few, indeed, and the doctrines of the being and unity of God, of the foundation of virtue, of the evidence of the mission of Christ, together with the belief of a resurrection and a future life, are by no means such as *the mind receives as soon as they are proposed*; and yet, I thank God, I have not the least doubt, or uncertainty in my mind concerning any of them; and shall have no scruple about using my utmost endeavours to propagate them, in the most open and direct methods.

Your second reason against all direct attempts to enlighten the minds of men is, p. 10. that *to place before mankind a series of arguments, on which our opinions are founded, is to call them to a kind of intellectual exercise, to which they are unaccustomed, and to assign them a task which they have not leisure to execute.* I find, then, that mankind have neither abilities nor leisure to be led beyond self-evident and primary truths, which the mind receives as soon as they are proposed. In my opinion, then, they would never advance so far in the scale of intellect as many of the brute creati-

on

tion, and that the elephant would exceed them in understanding as much as he doth in size. But I have much higher opinion of the capacities even of the bulk of mankind; I do not think that there is so very great a difference in our mental powers; and that the difference there *is* would nearly vanish, if they were more exercised, especially on moral and religious subjects. Of all the maxims of popery, the most dangerous is generally esteemed to be their keeping the common people in ignorance.

You admit indeed, p. 64. (but how consistent with what I have already quoted I leave to you to make out) that *great occasions may sometimes occur, when a sudden revolution in religious affairs may become expedient, and even necessary; but as it is only possible, that a sudden revolution may be necessary, even when the great occasions do occur; and it is only possible that they may occur, I cannot suppose that you think it all probable that such a revolution will ever become expedient, and much less necessary.* Indeed I should not wonder at their occurring so seldom, when nothing can be supposed to justify them but the cause of self-evident and primary truths; for as to all others, we who study them, must never expect to arrive at certainty ourselves; and if we could, it would be too difficult a task for the bulk of mankind to speculate at all about them.

Looking

Looking about, on every side, for a little light on this subject, I almost flatter myself, that I have made a discovery of *one* of the great occasions on which you would think that a direct attack on the errors and prejudices of mankind might be justified.

You mention, p. 43. the case of a young minister, who was dismissed from the service of a society of respectable and genteel Dissenters, in a large and polite city, for an occasional attendance upon the theatre, and for quoting some moral sentences from Shakespeare in his sermons, with a pretty severe censure on the conduct of the people, but without the least hint of any upon that of the minister; and afterwards, p. 14. on observing that ministers have eyes and ears in common with their hearers, and are, at least, equally capable with them of relishing the beauties of nature, and of being delighted with the melody of sound, or of being agreeably impressed and agitated by a lively fictitious representation of human characters; you see no reason, you say, why they should deny themselves those gratifications, to which their particular dispositions and taste lead them, provided they keep within (I suppose just within) the bounds of innocence, &c.

I therefore see no reason why I may not conclude, that, in your opinion, this young minister had

had no reason to cease frequenting the theatre, and quoting plays in his sermons, merely to oblige his people; and as you say they are a *genteel*, as well as a *respectable society*, it cannot be supposed that they dismissed him for the first offence, or without hinting to him the consequence of his conduct. In this case, therefore, you seem to be an advocate for his continuing to frequent the theatre, and quote plays at the risque of his interest in his congregation. Now really, Sir, you appear to me to be for reforming with much more violence and rashness than myself. But it seems that absurd and monstrous opinions in religion must be suffered to die away *without notice*, whereas a taste for any species of pleasure or amusement is an object of so much importance, that every thing must be risked for it.

For my part, if it were to be my misfortune to be expelled from the service of a respectable and genteel congregation, or, indeed, any congregation at all, I should think it more to my honour, that the cause of it should be my too strenuously insisting upon what I imagined to be some important truth of the gospel, than my not being able to forego the pleasure of frequenting the theatre, or quoting Shakespeare in my sermons.

It is on the subject of this letter, concerning the *uncertainty of truth*, that you quote Mons.

Charron

Charron with so much respect, saying, p. 68, *We may truly say with an ANTIEN writer, Il n'est, &c.* As you strongly recommend the reading of the best moral writers, both ANTIEN and MODERN, with a view to collect, and arrange the most just and striking observations, sentiments, &c. which occur on the several heads of morality; I presume that, by this quotation of *Charron*, you meant to give a specimen of your own collections from the *Antients*. But really, Sir, I cannot say that I admire your taste in these collections; for, in my opinion, the whole paragraph from which your quotation is taken, is a most execrable one, and the sentiment of it, such as every person, who has the understanding of a man, must reject with abhorrence. As I happen to be possessed of the very same elegant edition of this *antient writer* that you refer to, I easily found, and shall translate the passage you have quoted, with the greatest part of the remainder of the paragraph; and let our English readers judge for themselves, and judge like Englishmen and Protestants.

“ There is no desire more natural than that
 “ of knowing truth. We have recourse to every
 “ method we can think of for that purpose, but
 “ all in vain; for truth is a thing not to be at-
 “ tained. It is a thing that cannot be seized or
 “ handled, and much less can it be possessed by
 “ the mind of man. It inhabits the bosom of
 “ God

~ God—Man understands nothing aright ; al-
 “ ways attentive to appearances, which are as
 “ favourable to falshood, as to truth.—We are
 “ born to seek truth : to possess it, belongs to
 “ a higher power. If we happen to hit upon
 “ truth, it is by chance. We cannot keep, or
 “ possess it, or distinguish it from falshood.
 “ The mind receives error by the same channel
 “ by which it receives truth, and cannot distin-
 “ guish, or make choice in the case. The
 “ means which it employs to discover truth, are
 “ reason, and experience ; both very weak, un-
 “ certain, and unsteady. The greatest evidence
 “ of truth is the general consent of mankind ;
 “ but the number of fools far surpasses that of
 “ the wise ; and how can we come at this con-
 “ sent, but by general applause, given without
 “ judgment, or knowledge of the case, in the
 “ train of some, who have begun the dance,”
 p. 112.

As a contrast to this absurd piece of declama-
 tion, of a man who (in perfect consistence with
 the above extract) made *the truth of the popish*
religion, one of the *Trois Verités* of his book so
 called, I shall beg leave to quote once more a
 writer, not so *antient*, but in other respects, far
 more *venerable*.—

“ When the pursuit of truth is entered upon
 “ with a view to the glory of God, and the good

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of

“ of mankind, there is no employment more
 “ worthy of our natures, or more conducive to
 “ their purification or perfection. These are
 “ the wise, who, in the time of the end, shall,
 “ understand, and make an increase of know-
 “ ledge; who, by studying, and comparing to-
 “ gether the word and works of God, shall be
 “ enabled to illustrate and explain both; and
 “ who by turning many to righteousness shall,
 “ themselves, shine as the stars, for ever and
 “ ever.” *Hartley on Man*, Vol. II. p. 255.

I am, &c.

LETTER XII.

S I R,

THIS is the last letter with which I propose to trouble you, or myself; a circumstance that may be equally agreeable to us both. I also mean it to be very short, and to contain little more than answers to the queries you have put to me. The following paragraphs correspond to your numbers:

1. In the second edition of the *Views of the principles of the Dissenters*, you will see some alteration in the turn of the sentence respecting the

the state of the church of England, when the act of uniformity was passed. The alteration was suggested by a friend, who was satisfied that the mistake was corrected, and who had no ambition to figure in a pamphlet.

2. I meant respectable persons, with whose sentiments I am acquainted.

3. I meant the fluctuations in the government of Sweden, since the reformation; and especially the late revolutions.

4. The number 38,000 was a misprint in my edition of *Neal*. I doubted the fact; but finding no animadversion upon it in *Grey*, I ventured to print it, but only in figures, that, if it was a mistake, it might pass for a misprint in my pamphlet. You will see this altered in the second edition.

I cannot take my leave of you, and the public on this occasion, without observing that there is something singular in my fate, as a writer. I attack the prejudices of the Dissenters, and behold a clergyman of the church of England, stands up in their defence; and when, in defending the principles of the Dissenters, I unavoidably come too near the church of England, a Dissenter appears on their behalf.

All this is the more singular, as it can hardly be supposed, that there was any thing of this kind concerted between Mr. Venn and you, or that you meant to acknowledge any obligation to Mr. Venn, for his defence of the Dissenters. The more sensible Dissenters, however, I understand, only think themselves obliged to Mr. Venn for his good *intention*. I almost suspect that the members of the church of England will think their obligations to you, to be of a similar nature; and I begin to fear, lest (in order to complete the analogy of these remarkable facts) as a Dissenter better skilled in the controversy, has taken up the cause that Mr. Venn was unequal to, in defence of the Dissenters; some member of the church of England, thoroughly versed in the merits of the argument, should, in like manner, supplant you on the behalf of the establishment.

I mean, however, to shake my hands of all controversy as soon as I decently can; and I do not know whether I can hit upon a better expedient for this purpose, than to pair my different antagonists one against another; and since it so happens, that you are more opposite to one another than any of you are to me, I may as well slip aside, and leave you engaged together. You, Sir, for instance, attack me on one side, and Mr. Venn and the London minister on the other,
and

and I think myself to be in a decent kind of middle way between you. Standing thus between two fires, there can be no cowardice in retreating; and then, if you be disposed to continue the engagement, you cannot do better than combat one another.

The difficulty will be which of these two champions to match you with. I suppose you would think yourself disgraced by being committed with Mr. Venn; and indeed, his manner is much too *ungentlemanly* for you. But I am afraid that you would be overmatched with the other. You would write with more elegance indeed, and turn out finer, and better rounded periods; but then, Sir, he is far better skilled in *Logic* and *Metaphysics*; and this weapon would be like a scythe among your flowers of oratory.

I have heard, however, of two or three more antagonists; and as I am informed they are all on the same side with Mr. Venn, you shall have your choice of them; and thankful shall I be for taking any of them off my hands.

I shall beg leave to conclude with your own words, p. 67. *After having perused the preceding remarks, you will not, I think, consider them as wholly unnecessary, or intirely disapprove of this attempt to prevent the probable consequences of your inadvertence.*

inadvertence. I shall also esteem myself *very happy*, p. 76. if these remarks may, in the least degree, contribute to persuade you, for the future, not to be governed altogether, by that *under-strapping virtue* DISCRETION.

I am, Sir,

Your very humble Servant,

JOSEPH PRIESTLEY.

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C O N T E N T S.

LETTER I. Introductory. - - - P. 3

II. A vindication of the Dissenters,
and of the principles of religious
liberty shewn to be seasonable. 5

III. The Dissenting interest justly
called the cause of truth, reli-
gion, and liberty. 11

IV. The church of England charged
with Idolatry. - - - 17

V. Athanasian Idolatry particularly
considered. - - - 21

VI. The importance of the Dissent-
ing interest. - - - 27

VII. Inconsistencies in the Letter-wri-
ter's view of the Principles of
the Dissenters. His vindication
of Conformity considered. 32

VIII. The morality of subscription to
articles of faith considered 40

IX. A Defence of the *Free-Address to*
Protestant Dissenters as such. 46

X. Of the studies proper to form a
christian minister. - - - 49

XI. Of the method of conducting
reformations. - - - 58

XII. Answer to Queries, and conclusion. 66

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